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## Student program to aid forests

students to help state foresters tend to trees

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There's a classroom being planned miles from any school. It has no roof or walls and a bus will not get students there.

The state Departments of Education (DOE) and Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) have joined forces to bring students into a new learning environment in the state's Kapapala Koa Canoe Forest Management Area.

Initially, students will assist in identification and inventory of koa trees suitable for canoe use. In addition, students will help state foresters tend to seedlings, weed control and pruning.

Eventually, koa logs will be made available to schools and others to build canoes.

"This isn't just about providing logs for canoes or the environment," said Peter Young, Land Board chairman. "This is about culture and recreation. We can incorporate the study of mathematics, history, culture and English into this."

DLNR has set aside nearly 1,200 acres of land in Ka'u for growing native koa trees for traditional Hawaiian canoe making, timber and other activities.

The area adjoins state-managed forest reserves and is a portion of one of a 100,000-acre block of state forest, the largest intact block of remaining native forest in Hawaii. Elevation ranges from 3,640 to 5,100 feet.

"This area is known to grow tall, straight koa trees," Young said.

DOE Superintendent Pat Hamamoto said she hopes this will be the first of many future collaborations between DLNR and DOE that will explore the "living classrooms" of Hawaii.

"This program crosses many areas of the curriculum and we see this as a way to expand learning opportunities for Hawaii's children," Hamamoto said.

In addition to DOE and DLNR, forest industry representatives and others will be involved in this effort to assure there will be koa trees for canoes in the future.

Young also said the program represents DLNR's commitment to preserve and protect Hawaii's native forests.

"Unless we take decisive steps to plan and sustainably grow koa for canoe logs now," Young said, "there will be no more Hawaiian voyaging canoes built from native koa logs in the future."

Young said the program is still in its infancy and there are challenges. A management plan must be developed, with public and stakeholder input. Young said the schools are encouraged to participate in this part of the plan as well, but there is also the task of getting high-school kids into the forests.

"We're going to have to go up there and identify and evaluate trees to see what is available now, and what will be ready in 20 years," said Young. "We want to get the students to assist us in this initial work."

While Ka'u High School students are the first to benefit from the program, Young said similar programs will become available in other Hawaii forests. He also said the program would not be limited to the schools.

"We've had people come to us asking how they could get koa from the state," said Young. "We know the challenges the Polynesian Voyaging Society had when dealing with (the Hawaiian sailing canoe) Hokulea. I know there will be demand for voyaging canoes in the future, and we hope to be able to fill some of those needs."

He also said woodworkers in the schools and other organizations may benefit from the program, since not all of the koa that is harvested will be used for building canoes.

Young said he is inspired by the idea of kids planting koa seedlings and then gazing at a 100-year-old tree.

"They'll realize that the forests protect our ocean through erosion control, and supply us water from the watershed," he said. "A young person may realize it could take generations for a forest to recover if it is not properly managed," he said. "This is about the concept of time."

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